

Town of Melbourne Beach

SPECIAL TOWN COMMISSION MEETING

September 10, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

COMMUNITY CENTER – 509 OCEAN AVENUE

MINUTES

Commission Members:

Mayor Alison Dennington
Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow
Commissioner Robert Baldwin
Commissioner Anna Butler
Commissioner Tim Reed

Staff Members:

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro
Town Attorney Ryan Knight
Town Clerk Amber Brown

1. Call to Order

Mayor Alison Dennington called the meeting to order at 6:46 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Town Clerk Amber Brown conducted roll call

Commission Members Present

Mayor Alison Dennington
Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow
Commissioner Robert Baldwin
Commissioner Anna Butler
Commissioner Tim Reed

Staff Members Present

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro
Town Attorney Ryan Knight
Finance Manager Jennifer Kerr
Fire Chief Gavin Brown
Town Clerk Amber Brown

3. Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence

Mayor Alison Dennington led the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. Public Comments

After being acknowledged by the Mayor, members of the public should state their name and address for the record. The Commission encourages citizens to prepare their comments in advance. Each individual will have three (3) minutes to address the Commission on any topic(s) related to Town business, not on the Agenda.

Steve Walters – 416 Sixth Ave – The State Law is clear, if I vote in Indialantic, that's where I live. You can't live in 2 places at the same time. Requested the Commission remove the residency requirement from the Charter Amendment if you're not going to enforce it. - 2:40

Susan Stark – 307 Fifth – Spoke about different trust mindsets. When you have a zero trust mindset then you cannot function.

Kari Ross – 206 Flamingo Ln – Spoke about a previous comment about how our volunteers have become disrespected from comments from residents and the Commission. We have not heard from the volunteer firefighters. Poll the volunteers anonymously about the Chief's leadership. If we do not fund the hybrid model then we will be in the same position, but we will not have a choice. Fund it appropriately.

Terry Cronin – 150 Riverside Dr – Spoke about how there was an event of political violence where Charlie Kirk was murdered. Requested a moment of silence.

5. New Business

A. Concerns regarding the SAFER grant application – Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro spoke about how this is an opportunity for the Commission to discuss the SAFER grant. There was a request to FEMA to withdraw the grant, but it was not from the Town. This is an opportunity for the Commission to reaffirm the direction for the grant. Asked for Fire Chief Gavin Brown to talk about the grant. - 8:32

The Town Attorney Ryan Knight spoke about it being concerning that someone contacted FEMA to withdraw the application. The concern is that the application has now been flagged. The options are to reaffirm the Commission's position, do nothing or withdraw the application.

Mayor Alison Dennington said the Commission does not need to reaffirm it, the letter says nobody attempted to withdraw it.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about how the Department, as a good community partner, realizes asking for more help for the Fire Department is a cost increase to the residents so they wanted to see if they could offset the cost, which is why they decided to apply for the SAFER grant. The grant is the most labor-intensive grant they have applied for. Since applying for the grant, there have been accusations of fraud and comments about a claw back clause. There is nothing wrong with the grant application. You can disagree with the information within the grant, but that doesn't make it fraud. If people are trying to accuse the grant of being fraud to the federal government, that is concerning. This is adding additional work and stress on the department and staff, not knowing what is next with the next accusation or question. All of those labor costs are chipping away from the benefit the grant could provide if every day he has to fight against people who are trying to derail things and respond to accusations. He is a single staff department, he does not have the staff. He is doing the best he can. Leaving the grant in, is it going to cause more work. Is it worth constantly fighting legal battles about the legitimacy of the grant? People have come after him for a while but Dave Micka has been doing this for 40 years and has some of the highest safety licenses in the State. It is not okay with accusing Dave Micka.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about how the Fire Chief signed the grant. Fraud is a material misrepresentation or material omission. The Chief would have to be the one to withdraw it, not the Commission.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about being 100% comfortable with the grant and was not the one that signed it. His name is on it because he assisted with the preparation of the grant. Said he did not do any certifications. If there is zero trust in him, then he might not be the best person for the job as Fire Chief. We cannot move forward as a community, and he cannot move forward in leading the Fire Department if there is no trust in him at all. If everything is going to be questioned it's not going to be a productive relationship, and we're not going to be able to move forward.

Commissioner Anna Butler apologized for the way Chief Brown was spoken to in the last meeting. Apologized for being a Commissioner and not being able to stop it. To avoid that happening again, if things start to escalate, proposed taking a brief recess to take a breath and if it happens twice then adjourn the meeting.

Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow spoke about receiving a pointed email from a resident alluding to the behavior that was just referenced, the inappropriate accusations, and thanked Chuck Cain for the feedback. The Commission is working through some very tough topics right now. It is appropriate for the Commission to be challenged in ideas and questions, but the way Fire Chief Brown was spoken to was unacceptable. Apologized to Chief Brown. No public servant, no first responder, and no one deserves to be spoken to like that. Thanked Chuck Cain for holding the Commission accountable. The application was put forward in good faith, and the Town has the opportunity to be awarded funds and that is in the best interest of the Town. - 22:30

Commissioner Tim Reed spoke about how the email from FEMA said that nothing has to be done. The Commission's authority for a grant is only during the award time. There is nothing more to do here in his opinion.

Commissioner Tim Reed made a motion to adjourn; failed for a lack of second.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin apologized to Chief Brown and acknowledged many other staff members that have had to endure brow beating from the Mayor. Spoke about hearing from a lot of the volunteers and they have advised they are tired. Even if it has worked for years, times change. There are people applying for the volunteer positions and most are from across the bridge. We are at a place where we have to make a decision. The SAFER grant funds are going to be awarded to someone, why not us? People say hiring 6 firefighters is tying our hands to higher taxes forever. Florida is an at will State, so the positions do not have to be there forever. Indialantic does not automatically respond. Brevard County does not automatically respond. There is going to be conflict in the future for at least one more year. Does it make life hard? Absolutely, but believes the SAFER grant is the right decision for us. Could have a referendum in the future. To say 100% volunteerism is the absolute way to go for the future is not sound thinking. Will make a motion after everyone is done speaking that we affirm to FEMA that we are interested in keeping our SAFER grant active.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about speaking with the Fire Chief a few times, and spoke about the Department being underfunded. Read the grant, apologized that she thought the Fire Chief signed it. Not trying to say he is not telling the truth. Thinks there are problems with the veracity of the grant, and potential issues with the grant. Going forward

thinks he needs a full time admin staff like the other departments, as well as a maintenance person. It's a shame he hasn't had that. The next year should be getting the staffing that the other departments have. Does not think this needs to be voted on. This is potentially a coordinated attempt for a bunch of people to come in with their pitchforks, sponsored by the Manager. It was a vague agenda item based on an email where we don't need to do anything. Does feel Chief Brown has not been given the admin staff he needs.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin asked Mayor Alison Dennington if she called FEMA to withdraw the grant.

Mayor Alison Dennington said no, she did not. Town Attorney Ryan Knight is aware of this. Said she called to ask a hypothetical question about a claw back.

Commissioner Robert Baldwin made a motion that we affirm to FEMA our grant application for the SAFER grant in writing from the Town Attorney; Commissioner Anna Butler seconded;

Lauren Hardman – 320 Sixth Ave – Spoke about how the meeting was called to order to determine one of 3 different issues. Asked the Town Attorney if he received anything from FEMA about a stop order from the grant. Been in the Fire Department for over 20 years for this community. Worked in corporate and has been a teacher with Brevard County Schools. She can help the Chief with the admin parts, but only if the Commission puts a stop to the accusations. - 37:34

Town Attorney Ryan Knight said the email is all he received. Said he asked FEMA who requested to withdraw the application and they did not disclose that information.

Joanie Shepherd – 201 Third Ave – Thanked the Fire Chief, but spoke about needing more volunteer signs. Spoke about how Indian Harbour Beach is not comparable.

Jan Pence – 200 Riverside Dr – Asked to go over the Charter to know who has the authority to do all the nit picking that the Mayor does. Pretty sure the Mayor made the complaint, and asked if it is proven, will the Mayor step down?

Walter Hardman – 320 Sixth Ave – Spoke about being in the department for a long time. He is an adjunct teacher, so he is only here part time, and he is an officer. Are the volunteers not allowed to go out to dinner or have time with their families? Understands that from the Town Charter, the department heads answer to the Manager.

Bruce Pickett – 1501 Oak – Spoke about being a paid firefighter for 25 years, and has worked for a lot of Fire Chiefs. Some he appreciated and some he didn't, but he appreciates Chief Brown. Appreciates adding an admin, he needs it, but the focus should be on taking care of the people of Melbourne Beach and having a quick response. It can be difficult for the volunteers to get up and come in with what is being said and done here. For professionalism, as long as you are breathing there is room for improvement.

Kari Ross – 206 Flamingo Ln – Spoke about how our Fire Chief has been disrespected. In the event we do not move forward with a hybrid model, and our volunteers are so upset because you are not listening to them. If they all quit, then what happens? Because they

are all over the Mayor's disrespect. Then you are responsible for raising all of our taxes without any input.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown spoke about having to look at alternatives for outsourcing, looking to Brevard County or Indialantic.

Chuck Cain - 309 Surf Rd - Spoke about the Chief probably needs admin support, but that is off topic. Asked that the public meetings be civil rather than a court proceeding because that is how it seems.

Susan Stark – 307 Fifth Ave – Spoke about how the vote to move forward with the hybrid model 3-2 was only if the grant is awarded. There is a misperception that the Commission approved the 6 firefighters. The real issue is the time is running out for Chief Brown's officer staff retiring and moving into a new season of their life. You cannot change that fact. Suggests getting information to the Town so the Town can understand it is not one side or the other, there's options, but it is the Chief's expert opinion to follow that plan.

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about how in order to do the referendum, they would have had to have it over a month ago on the ballot.

Jason Judge – 206 Flamingo Ln – Asked the Town Attorney if there is any communication to let the townspeople know who may have communicated with FEMA.

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro spoke about requesting the Town Clerk to see if there were any emails with the elected officials and FEMA, and there is an email from FEMA to the Mayor thanking the Mayor for the information and saying how to file any concerns with the Department of Homeland Security. Mayor Alison Dennington responded saying she may have messed up putting that information in, and that she would call the hotline. Asked the Mayor, if she did not make the request, what did she send to FEMA?

Mayor Alison Dennington spoke about how she never asked and would never ask to withdraw the grant. She asked a few questions and asked for a contact where she could address some concerns. She has done nothing wrong.

Jason Judge – 206 Flamingo Ln - Said it sounds like the Mayor did this. Apologized for what the Fire Chief has had to put up with and thanked him for all his work.

Recess 7:46 pm – 7:57 pm

Town Clerk Amber Brown conducted roll call

Commission Members Present

Mayor Alison Dennington
Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow
Commissioner Robert Baldwin
Commissioner Anna Butler
Commissioner Tim Reed

Staff Members Present

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro
Town Attorney Ryan Knight
Finance Manager Jennifer Kerr
Fire Chief Gavin Brown
Town Clerk Amber Brown

Mayor Alison Dennington asked the Fire Chief Gavin Brown to speak about his signature on the grant.

Fire Chief Gavin Brown said the copy of the grant that was provided to the Commission does not show that they signed the grant as the authorized organization representative. Said his name is there, not as the authorized organization representative but as a secondary contact and as someone that helped prepare the grant. - 1:40 (second video)

Bryan Troy – 509 Hibiscus – Asked the Fire Chief not to leave, this Town respects and appreciates him. Thanked the Commissioners that apologized to the Fire Chief. Said we are not all experts at everything. Let people that are experts in their field do what is in their field. Asked the Town Attorney if there was any proof that the emails or communication to FEMA came from the Mayor of Melbourne Beach. Asked if there was any personal communication that the residents of Melbourne Beach should be aware of that may cost us all the money from FEMA and has further made us a laughing stock of Brevard County.

Town Attorney Ryan Knight said no, he did ask FEMA and they would not disclose the information. Said he is not aware of any personal information that has been transmitted to FEMA.

Frank LaGrassa – 412 First Ave – Spoke about it not being disrespectful with questioning if the Chief is making an effort to keep a volunteer department volunteer. Spoke about the Fire Chief in Indialantic and how he was trying to drive the volunteers out.

There was discussion on a resident getting kicked out of the meeting.

Recess – 8:04 – 8:08 pm

Town Clerk Amber Brown conducted roll call

Commission Members Present

Mayor Alison Dennington
Vice Mayor Dawn Barlow
Commissioner Robert Baldwin
Commissioner Anna Butler
Commissioner Tim Reed

Staff Members Present

Town Manager Elizabeth Mascaro
Town Attorney Ryan Knight
Finance Manager Jennifer Kerr
Fire Chief Gavin Brown
Town Clerk Amber Brown

Steve Walters – 416 Sixth Ave – Spoke about how maybe 2 dozen people here have spent a lot of time devoted to the boards, a lot of volunteers that are committed and they don't get a dime. What happens if the volunteers walk out tomorrow? Then Indialantic or Brevard County will take the calls. Hopes this never happens and we can continue with the volunteer Fire Department. Believes the Mayor was set up with this meeting. Hopes everyone in the future can get along and just do the Town's business. - 12:55

Marivi Walker – 500 Riverside Dr – Asked Fire Chief Gavin Brown if what Steve Walters just said about a mutual aid agreement with Brevard County and the Town of Indialantic was true. Said what the Fire Chief said is very different from what Steve Walters said.

Fire Chief Gavin spoke about how all Fire Departments in Brevard County have a mutual aid agreement which means we have to respond and attempt to resolve the problem, then we can request for assistance. It does not mean you can call them to come take care of it by themselves for free. It means we have to try to take care of it ourselves first and then we can call for assistance.

Katie Cox – 1408 Atlantic St – Spoke about never working for anyone with more integrity than this Fire Chief, or more knowledge than Dave Micka, and Amber Brown who is a Lieutenant of the department and also the Town Clerk. They together put in more hours than almost anyone. Not just work hours, but weekends, nights all the time. Does not believe that this meeting was a setup. Concerned that the Commission only approved the paid Fire Department dependent on the grant.

Heather Coalter – 402 Driftwood – Asked for clarification from the Mayor if she communicated with FEMA and undermined the attempt to get the grant.

Mayor Alison Dennington said she has already said everything. Said she will not repeat it.

Commissioner Anna Butler said she supports what the Fire Chief thinks is right, her reservation right now is that this complaint has happened and being swept under the rug, and whoever did it (and she believes it was someone with a title), someone does not want it to happen. Will we still pepper the Fire Chief with accusations and concerns and doubts? If that will continue to happen, then we should probably just drop it. Thinks we need a consensus that this interrogation will stop.

Mayor Alison Dennington said that was not related to the motion/vote.

Motion carried 3-2 with Mayor Alison Dennington and Commissioner Tim Reed dissenting.

6. Adjournment


Commissioner Robert Baldwin moved to adjourn; Commissioner Tim Reed seconded; Motion carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.



Alison Dennington
Mayor

ATTEST:



Rachel Pembroke
Transcriptionist

Rachel Pembroke (Oct 9, 2025 14:31:35 EDT)

